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AUTHOR O'Neil, William L.: Lazar, Alfred L.
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ABSTRACT

Presented at the 1979 Annual Conference of the California State Federation/Council for Exceptional Children, the paper reports on a study conducted to survey the attitudes of 166 college students (ages 17 to 41 years) toward the handicapped, to ascertain if a program devoted to attitude change might be needed and to determine the influence of age and sex variables on the criterion instrument used, the Attitude Towards Handicapped Individuals Scale (ATHI). It was found that both males and females were already accepting the handicapped in a positive manner. A sex difference favoring the females was found, but no difference for the age variable. It is suggested that separate norms be developed for the sex variable with the ATHI. (Author/DLS)

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STUDYING ATTITUDE ACCEPTANCE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS TOWARD THE HANDICAPPED WITH SEX AND AGE AS FACTORS

Rev. William L. O'Neil
College of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minn.

Alfred L. Lazar
California State University, Long Beach

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SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
California State University Long Beach
Long Beach, California 90840

There is a growing social awareness about the rights and the needs of the handicapped in America today. It might be said that this current period of awareness started during the administration of President John Kennedy nearly twenty years ago, and now appears to be at a height with the impact of Public Law 94-142 and the growing practice of mainstreaming in schools and other social agencies of the handicapped. The mass media are daily reporting on cases and achievements in this area of human development. One might ask, to what extent has the ideas and attitudes of individuals toward the handicapped been changed through both formal and informal information that has been presented. In light of this observation, the writers feel that a needs survey be conducted to ascertain if attitudes need to be changed in particular situations with specific target populations.

The purpose of this study was to survey the attitudes of a group of college students to ascertain if a program devoted toward attitude change might be needed as regards the handicapped. Furthermore, the age and sex variables would also be studied as to their influence on the criterion instrument used to measure attitudes. Three research questions were formulated to direct the effort of this investigation:

1. Is there a need to develop a special training program to enhance college student attitudes toward the handicapped in a more positive or accepting direction?
2. Does the age variable influence atttudes and acceptance ?
3. Does the sex variable influence attitudes and acceptance ?

DESIGN AND PROCEDURE:

Sample: The subjects in this study consisted of 166 college students from a small religious school in St. Paul, Minnesota, and included 116 males and 50 females. They ranged in age from 17 to 41 in years.

Instrument: The criterion instrument used to measure attitudes toward the

the handicapped was the ATHI (Attitudes Toward Handicapped Individuals, Lazar, 1973) scale. This is a 20-item Likert-type scale that is essentially a modification of the ATDP scale by Yuker, Block, and Younng (1966). The purpose of the ATHI is to measure attitudes toward the handicapped on the basis of acceptance or rejection. The possible range of scores is from 0 to 120, the higher scores indicating greater acceptance of the handicapped, and lower scores indicating rejection. The basic modification between the ATDP and ATHI was the changing of the term disabled to read handicapped. It was based on the assumption that the latter term was much broader in meaning and could include all types of exceptionality. Each of the 20 items is rated on a 6-point scale ranging from "disagree very much" to "agree very much."

Pearson product moment correlations of .83, .80, and .78 have been reported between the ATHI and ATDP. A coefficient of stability reliability of .73 (test-retest) after two weeks has been reported. All correlations mentioned were significant at the .01 level (Lazar and Denham, 1974; Sippel, Lazar, and D'Alonzo, 1976; and Lazar & Stodden, 1977).

Administration: The instrument was administered by the same individual as was with the scoring of the instruments.

Data Treatment: Data was statistically treated by means of an independent mean t test, and one way anlaysis of variance.

RESULTS:

Table 1. gives the means and standard deviations for the sex and age variables. An inspection of all the mean scores reveals all were accepting of the handicapped when the score of 70 is used as the criterion as proposed by Lazar (1973). Yet, a sex difference was found favoring the female group as being more accepting than males at the .01 level of significance on the mean t test, as shown in Table 2. As indicated in Table 3, an ANOVA for

four different age groups revealed no significant age difference.

DISCUSSION: The purpose of this study was to answer three research questions as was stated in the beginning of this article. The first question asked, was is there a need to develop a special training program to enhance college student attitudes toward the handicapped in a more positive or accepting direction. Based upon the group means on the ATHI as reported in Table 1 it can be said that the mean of 78.70 for males and 84.70 for females are both well above the 70 point level suggested as the separation point for considering acceptance or rejection. In a similar manner, the four age group means of 81.57, 80.96, 77.24, and 81.00 offer the same conclusion as indicated for the sex variable. It might now be asserted that it would be a questionable effort to try and enhance ideas toward the handicapped since the data tends to suggest greater acceptance. Yet, we must be cautious and state there could still be an effort to cultivate greater understanding of the unique characteristics of different handicapping conditions. Thus, in this sense, the concept of understanding includes acceptance, but also much more in scope. A further observation would suggest that to try and change attitudes using a test-retest design over a period of time would probably yield no significant differences because the scores are already rather high.

The second question asked if there might be a difference in attitude because of age. No age difference in attitudes was found as shown in Table 3. It is necessary to point out that the age spread of three groups was only by one or two years, whereas the fourth age group ranged in age from 21 to 41. If one really would want to focus on age per se, it is suggested that any future research focus on a better age spread and grouping.

Finally, the third question asked if the sex variable would yield a difference. As reported in Table 2. a significant sex difference was found between the two sex groups favoring the female group. While both groups were

accepting, we can conclude that this female group was more so. This finding of such a sex bias is similar to that reported in other studies with the ATHI and ATDP (Lazar and others, 1971, 1972, 1976, 1978; and Yuker and others, 1966). In fact, the latter authors developed and recommended separate norms on the ATDP for the sex groups, which these writers would agree. One reason for this sex bias favoring the females in our society might be do to the role expectancies fostered (Lazar, Orpet, and Revie, 1972).

SUMMARY

A study was conducted to ascertain the need for planning and developing an instructional effort towards changing attitudes toward the handicapped. It was found that both males and females were already greatly accepting the handicapped in a positive manner. A sex difference favoring the female group was reported, but no difference for the age variable. It is suggested that separate norms be developed for the sex variable with the ATHI, much in the same manner that has been done for the ATDP.

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TABLE 1.

Means and Standard Deviations
for Sex and Age Groups

	SEX = 166		AGE = 166			
	M=116	F=50	17-18=62	19=53	20=22	21-41=29
MEAN	78.70	84.70	81.57	80.96	77.24	81.00
s.d.	13.90	15.96	13.76	14.39	15.70	16.41

TABLE 2.

T test Data for Sex Variable

GROUP	N	MEAN	S.D.	df	t	p.
Male	116	78.70	13.90			
				164	2.44	.01 *
Female	50	84.70	15.96			

* significant statistically

TABLE 3.

ANOVA for Four Age Groups

SOURCE	df	SS	MS	F-Ratio	p.
Between Groups	3	254.81	84.94	.395	n.s.
Within Groups	163	33794.23	215.25		
TOTAL	166	34049.03			